

# The Iron Road in the Prairie State: The Story of Illinois Railroading

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ISSN 0003-4827

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## Recommended Citation

Randolph, Scott E. "The Iron Road in the Prairie State: The Story of Illinois Railroading." *The Annals of Iowa* 76 (2017), 135-137.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12364>

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main line slicing through the county on an east-west axis. The Peoria, Illinois, stem of the Minneapolis & St. Louis also served the northern part of the county. But as early as the 1930s line abandonments began, resulting from increasing highway competition, eventually leaving only the high-density Burlington main line to serve the county with freight and Amtrak service.

Resembling water transport, aviation never gained much local importance. There were early balloon ascensions and aerial "barnstormers," entertainment that morphed into pleasure flights and commercial agricultural services. Landing strips appeared, the most notable being development of a small, modern airport in Mount Pleasant after World War II.

The historic preservation commission has created an unusual type of localized transportation work. Readers should enjoy its efforts. Perhaps this approach will inspire others to consider a similar study of their county's transportation heritage.

*The Iron Road in the Prairie State: The Story of Illinois Railroading*, by Simon Cordery. Railroads Past and Present Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. xvii, 216 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$60.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Scott E. Randolph is assistant professor of business administration at the University of Redlands in southern California. His research and writing have focused on railroads during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

Much like its prairie neighbors to the west, railroads made Illinois. Chicago remains the most important railroad hub in North America, and the railroads that traversed the state provided the critical infrastructure that linked the commodity crops of the Great Plains; the coal, dairy, and manufacturing of the Midwest; the timber and international trade of the Pacific Coast; and the cotton and timber of the South with the markets, specialty manufacturing, ports, and capital of the Northeast and New England. Simon Cordery chronicles this relationship from the 1830s to the present with an emphasis on the period prior to 1945. Readers familiar with the two volumes on Iowa railroads in the Railroads Past and Present series produced by Indiana University Press will find much to enjoy in this volume on railroading in Illinois. Like other books in the series, *The Iron Road in the Prairie State* is intended for railroad enthusiasts and general readers rather than for an academic audience. The book is well documented, but the author does not attempt to break new ground in his analysis, concentrating instead on providing a concise and eminently readable survey of the topic.

This is a solid example of traditional, institutional railroad history. Author Simon Cordery possesses a detailed command of the extensive literature on the subject, as his endnotes reveal, and has a particular talent for concise and effective descriptions of the complex financial and organizational histories of the many railroads that served Illinois. Particularly well executed is his narration of the early twentieth-century financial manipulations of the Rock Island lines by the Reid-Moore syndicate, perhaps the most egregious of the stock-watering, "robber baron" stories. Cordery lays out clearly the effects of this chicanery on the company's long-term well-being. Likewise, his extended discussion of the life cycle of passenger service in the state, spread throughout the book, is detailed and sympathetic. He does not neglect the state's many interurban railways and smaller carriers, such as the Chicago Great Western, but devotes the majority of the book to the largest regional and transcontinental systems.

The experiences of the passengers, investors, shippers, and citizens whose lives the railroads touched are largely absent from this institutional history. Cordery does dedicate one chapter to railroad labor, but the discussion focuses entirely on the nineteenth century and is generally sympathetic to the viewpoint of management. There are passing references in later chapters but no substantive development of the experience of railroad workers after 1900 aside from a discussion of the 1922 shop workers' strike. In a state where by 1900 some 5 percent of workers labored for the railroads, more attention to their experience would have broadened the book's usefulness. For instance, a discussion of the massive reduction in the state's railroad labor force that began after 1960 as a consequence of mergers and the rapid demise of passenger services and branch lines would have provided important local context for the larger tapestry of railroading nationally.

Given the otherwise even-handed chronological coverage of the period through 1945, the dizzying changes faced by the railroads in subsequent decades receive comparatively little discussion. The rapid changes in Illinois railroading after the Penn Central and Rock Island bankruptcies receive only a few pages despite being, in turn, the largest corporate bankruptcy to that date and the largest railroad liquidation of all time. There is no discussion of the emergence of new regional and short-line railroads in the wake of those bankruptcies, or of the Staggers Rail Act, the creation of Conrail, or the merger wave of the 1980s and 1990s. A more robust discussion of those changes and the resulting line abandonments that ensued would round out the book's usefulness for those interested in the contemporary railroad industry. Railroad history in general desperately needs a more contemporary emphasis.

The volume contains a fine selection of black-and-white illustrations, although the photo reproductions are generally too light. The images favor less well-known photographs from the collections of institutions such as the Library of Congress, Lake Forest College, and the Center for Railroad Photography and Art. Maps are interspersed throughout, an important visual aid in a state with a bewildering number of railroads and routes, especially at the turn of the twentieth century. A follow-up map showing the remaining routes at the time of publication would have been a nice addition.

Overall, these minor complaints notwithstanding, this is a useful addition to the series. It will be of interest to those who possess even a passing interest in the railway industry.

*The Jefferson Highway: Blazing the Way from Winnipeg to New Orleans*, by Lyell D. Henry Jr. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016. ix, 213 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Thomas Gubbels is associate professor at Lincoln University. He is a former senior historic preservation specialist with the Missouri Department of Transportation who has written extensively on Missouri's highway system.

Travelers along Interstate 35 through Iowa rarely slow down enough to notice the landscape around them. However, if drivers left the interstate and instead traveled along U.S. Highways 65 and 69, they would encounter a roadside that still has much in common with early to mid-twentieth-century Iowa. The first true "inter-state" highways were not established in 1956 by the National Defense Highway Act or in 1926 by the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads. As Lyell Henry vividly recounts in *The Jefferson Highway: Blazing the Way from Winnipeg to New Orleans*, beginning in 1915 local Iowa officials and business leaders began to map out, mark, and create an all-weather highway across the state and the entire nation. Their creation, the Jefferson Highway, transformed the countryside and represented the achievement of a uniquely progressive vision that helped Iowa move forward into the twentieth century.

Henry begins his book by analyzing the core values shared by the men who created the Jefferson Highway Association (JHA), the organization responsible for the creation of this early twentieth-century trail system. Good roads advocates such as Edwin Meredith and Thomas McDonald called on Iowans to join them in an effort to improve the state's roads and connect them to the outside world. Although some highway advocates may have been motivated by personal profit, most Iowa supporters of the Jefferson Highway, Henry argues, shared a